

Docket 04-296

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From: Curtis Robbins [mailto:crobbins@gwu.edu]

Sent: Monday, August 16, 2004 12:46 PM

To: Pam Gregory

Subject: My comments: EAS NPRM, paras 36-41, released today (8/12/04)

Ms. Gregory,

A friend of mine sent me a copy of the statement about emergency warnings and alerts for individuals with disabilities. I have written some comments, and wish to share them with you.

a) PA systems are always available to make warnings and alerts for everyone -- who can hear. There are no text message boards posted in public places for the deaf to catch the waves of those emergency warnings and alerts. Paragraph 4 already shows why people would not do it. That's the loophole: a majority of business owners in the private sector would do anything -- at all costs -- to avoid paying for them! The Federal and State governments included! This has always been a "déjà vu all over again" thing! It has always been a hard upward battle for the deaf to get this through to the public. For example, fire alarm systems with strobe lights are found in the hallways rather than in individual offices or rooms where deaf people are occupied. If a deaf person is left in one of those rooms alone -- there is no way for that person to know there is any emergency situation. Perhaps, a special paging device -- programmed for any public building should be given out to the deaf occupants and in their possession at all times. Those pagers would be like those used in the large, busy restaurants which uses them to alert the waiting party that their table is ready.

b) Not everybody sits around watching television all day but there are radios blasting loud and clear for anyone who can hear those warnings and alerts. Here is a suggestion: more and more deaf people have pagers (Sidekick, Treo, Blackberry, etc) - why not develop those warnings and alerts through them? Sprint, MCI, T-Mobile, Verizon, Cingular, and AT&T are all service providers for the deaf people using those devices. Perhaps, these services should be involved in this emergency warning and alert system. There are two major drawbacks I can foresee here:

1) Pagers with text messaging systems have severely limited service coverage than regular voice calls. For instance, people have been seen making voice calls in the Metro underground stations very easily. It is a well known fact that text messaging does not work below street level as well as walled-in enclosures, and

2) In light of the service providers mentioned above, they serve the public nationwide and generally do not have local or regional information to warn or alert deaf people who have those pagers of any life-threatening situations where they are at.

Finally, as a deaf person using the pager approaching retirement, one of the biggest problems is not to be able to make emergency calls, if - God forbid -- something serious should happen to me or my wife, who is also deaf. We've often driven in areas where service coverage is not available especially for text messaging -- especially in large

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cities (ie: Silver Spring, one of the largest cities in Maryland, does not have text-messaging coverage in many areas!!). At this point, it would be very important that text-messaging coverage be as widespread as the regular voice call coverage as well as, perhaps, even more extended air coverage for text-messaging.

Thank you very much.

Curtis Robbins

01/14/2004

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